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INFO RUEHBO/AMEMBASSY BOGOTA 5300
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RUEHLP/AMEMBASSY LA PAZ NOV LIMA 1898
RUEHMU/AMEMBASSY MANAGUA 0262
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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [SP](#)
SUBJECT: ROYAL SMACKDOWN OF CHAVEZ MEETS WITH SPANISH
PUBLIC APPROVAL

REF: A. SANTIAGO 1825

[1](#)B. CARACAS 2187

[1](#)1. (U) SUMMARY: Judging from the reaction in Spain, King Juan Carlos seems to have been speaking for many when he asked Venezuelan President Chavez to shut up at the Iberoamerican Summit (ref a). His angry rebuke of Chavez has gone over well with the Spanish public, and the recording of it is reputedly the most popular cell phone ring tone download in Spain. The Spanish Government, on the other hand, is trying play down the story even while the opposition Partido Popular is trying to take advantage of the incident by suggesting it was a result of President Zapatero's weak handling of Chavez. END SUMMARY.

[1](#)2. (U) The defining moment in Santiago continues to be recycled in the Spanish media. Between the TV replays, YOUTUBE, and the proliferation of related jokes and songs making their rounds on the Internet, the Spanish Government is, at least for now, fighting a losing battle in trying to turn the corner on this one. The major dailies carried front-page photos of the King gesturing angrily toward Chavez earlier in the week. An editorial cartoon printed November 15 in independent daily El Mundo depicted a disgruntled Chavez at a desk being asked by an open-mouthed globe, "why don't you just shut up?" But while many Spaniards seem to have enjoyed the news of the royal shushing -- and the international spotlight for standing up to the Venezuelan -- the opposition Partido Popular has tried to make political hay, insisting Spain recall its Ambassador to Venezuela, who has not yet presented credentials. The Partido Popular has also suggested that Zapatero is somehow to blame for Chavez's behavior because his government has been tolerant of Chavez. (Note: There is a certain irony here since the incident was provoked when Chavez insulted former Spanish President Aznar -- of the Partido Popular -- and Zapatero gamely rose to Aznar's defense. It was apparently Chavez's interruptions of Zapatero that finally snapped the King's patience. The press has reported on Aznar's subsequent phone call to thank Zapatero. End note.)

[1](#)3. (U) Editorialists sympathetic to the Partido Popular have cataloged the incident along with Spain's failure to win the November 14 election to select the NATO Military Committee chairman as yet another example of the Zapatero Government's alleged incompetence in foreign affairs. There have also been suggestions in the media that Zapatero was too gentle in

his handling of Chavez, while others have blamed him for putting the King in such a position. A distinctly minority view is that the King's outburst was a mistake because it will merely serve as grist for Chavez's populist tactics. The left-wing media, perhaps trying to burnish Zapatero's handling of the summit, has reported that the King's subsequent walk-out during Nicaraguan President Ortega's rant about Spanish business and alleged Spanish interference in his country's elections was orchestrated by the King and Zapatero on the fly, with them agreeing that one needed to make a gesture while the other stayed behind to hold the fort.

14. (U) Attempting to calm the situation, FM Moratinos has publicly supported the King's words and actions while attempting to tone down the dispute. Moratinos has said he does not think the spat should affect Spanish-Venezuelan relations and that he wanted dialogue with Venezuela to continue, provided that Spain and its institutions were respected. Addressing a Europa Press breakfast November 15, Moratinos explained the government preferred not to recall its Ambassador for consultations so as not to risk a negative backlash against Spanish business and residents in Venezuela. Moratinos told attendees that Spanish companies otherwise critical of Chavez had asked Spain to remain calm in defense of their interests and said an ambassador is most necessary when things do not go well.

15. (SBU) Comment: This too will fade, although the King's wonderfully succinct message to Chavez and the evident anger with which it was delivered will not be forgotten. As the Ambassador told the press (while declining to comment on Venezuela or Chavez), Spain has a "rey de lujo" (luxury model king). It seems most Spaniards would agree.
LLORENS